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ABSTRACT

Two suburban school districts in Indiana were designated as inclusion pilot sites by the state legislature during the 1992-93 school year. Twenty-one students with moderate or severe disabilities and sensory impairments were integrated into their neighborhood schools. Observations of parents and general education teachers of these students were assessed using surveys, and principals in the schools were interviewed. As perceived by these groups, the greatest success of the program was the social benefit to the included students. Critical factors in the program's success included training in modification of curriculum, collaboration among colleagues, and approaching the inclusion process with a positive attitude. Contains 25 references. (Author/DB)

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Observations of Parents, Teachers, and Principals During the First Year of Implementation of Inclusion in Two Midwestern School Districts

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Running Head: OBSERVATIONS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND PRINCIPALS

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Abstract

Two suburban school districts in Indiana were designated as an inclusion pilot site by the state legislature during the 1992-93 school year. Twenty-one students with moderate or severe disabilities were integrated into their neighborhood schools. Observations of parents and general education teachers of these students were assessed using surveys, while principals in the schools were personally interviewed. As perceived by these groups, the greatest success of the program was the social benefit to the included students. Training in modification of curriculum, collaboration among colleagues, and approaching the inclusion process with a positive attitude appear to have effected changes vital to the program's success.

Observations of Parents, Teachers, and Principals During the First Year of Implementation of Inclusion in Two Midwestern School Districts

Total educational segregation of students with disabilities is, for the most part, a thing of the past. Beginning in 1975 with PL 94-142 and extending through to one of its amendments in 1990, PL 101-476 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), alternative placements for students with disabilities have been questioned and debated.

Research within the last 10 years on the efficacy of segregated special education programs does not support this option. On the contrary, it has been found that students with disabilities benefit from placement in general education settings where interactions with students who are not disabled are common (Brimer, 1990; Halvorsen & Sailor, 1990; McDonnell, Wilcox, & Hardman, 1991; Meyer, Peck, & Brown, 1991). There is clear support for integrated, less restrictive environments.

The development of these types of programs have been influenced by the regular education initiative. According to Stainback, Stainback, and Bunch (1989), the purpose of the initiative "was to find ways to serve students classified as having mild and moderate disabilities in regular classrooms by encouraging special education and other special programs to form a partnership with regular

education" (p. 11). Some proponents of the initiative, including Allington & McGill-Franzen (1989), Gartner and Lipsky (1989), Jenkins, Pious, and Jewell (1990), and Will (1986), have extended its basic assumptions and proposed a unified, consolidated program of services serving even the most severely disabled students. For these students, rationales for the merger of regular and general education have been based on "the need to learn in natural environments in which age-appropriate models of behavior and in which functional demands for performance are operative" (York, Vandercook, MacDonald, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, 1992, p. 244). According to Stainback and Stainback (1989), "A major advantage of merger is that it can offer the best from present day 'special' and 'regular' education within integrated, regular education classrooms and schools" (p. 262).

If the education of students with even severe disabilities is to take place in the regular classroom and if "the essence of the regular education initiative is the authority and responsibility given the classroom teacher for educating all students assigned to him or her" (Jenkins et al., 1990, p. 482), what role does the specialist play? Does acceptance of the initiative mean that special education services will be subordinated? What form should a partnership take?

Special and Regular Education Collaboration

Jenkins et al. (1990) discussed several models of partnership which have developed in a unified system and which, consistent with the regular education initiative, have left the instructional decision-making and responsibility primarily with the classroom teacher. "Consultation" models are those which involve specialists and classroom teachers in prereferral intervention programs that aim to assist students with learning or behavior problems. "Direct-service" models provide instruction to the student with disabilities by the classroom teacher or specialist/paraprofessional within the regular education classroom after referral and identification (pp. 487-488).

The direct-service model is exemplified in its broadest sense in the "full inclusion" concept, which "holds the promise of integrating not only the children, but also their families into full community participation" (Galant & Hanline, 1993, p. 293). Although conceptualized differently in different districts, basically the amount of support given to the classroom teacher by the specialist is determined by the nature of the student's disability. Thus, the most severely disabled student might have a full-time program assistant with him throughout the day and/or be seen regularly by the specialist in the classroom, while a mildly disabled student might be instructed by the classroom

teacher with minimal intervention/feedback from the specialist (Friend & Cook, 1993; Hamre-Nietupski, McDonald, Nietupski, 1992; Jenkins, Jewell, Leicester, Jenkins, & Troutmen, 1991). In either case, however, the student is a participant in all general education subject matter classes, including art, music, physical education, lunch, recess, etc. How effective is inclusion?

Research on Inclusion

The issue of inclusion is looked upon by some as more of an ethical, rather than a scientific question, as stated by Stainback and Stainback: "Whether integration is right or wrong is not a scientific or research question. . . . Based on moral values, the only defensible thing to do is integrate and do research to determine how best to provide appropriate instruction for every student within integrated classrooms and schools" (1989, p. 264). This idea, together with the fact that inclusion is a relatively new phenomenon, results in little empirical information to date on its benefits and limitations. However, there are reports (i.e., Davern & Schnorr, 1991; Elias, 1986; Forest, 1986) of friendships that have developed between children with and without disabilities and of other social benefits to each group.

Two studies reported on recently detail the perspectives of both teachers and classmates involved in the

inclusion process. In their 1993 article, Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, and Schattman discussed the content of interviews of 19 general education teachers who have had a student with severe disabilities in their class. "Results showed that despite teachers' initial negative reactions to the placement of a child with severe disabilities in their classrooms, 17 teachers described transforming experiences of a more positive nature and related many benefits to the students with disabilities, their classmates, and the teachers themselves" (p.359). York et al. (1992) surveyed general educators, special educators, and classmates without disabilities at the end of the first year that middle school students with severe disabilities were integrated into two suburban midwestern communities. Although there were some differences in perspectives between general and special educators, all felt the integration experiences were positive for themselves and for students. Classmates felt that their acceptance of students with disabilities had increased and also that there were positive outcomes in the area of social competence of the students with disabilities.

Some educators hesitate to support such a drastic change in programming for students with disabilities for various reasons. Lieberman (1985) and Messinger (1985) questioned the willingness and capability of regular

educators to meet the needs of students with disabilities, the collaboration of the general and special educators in a way consistent with the regular education initiative, and a possible danger in the ceasing of classification of students according to handicap with the idea that they might not receive appropriate educational services. Kaufmann, Gerber, and Semmel (1988) argued, contrary to what advocates of the initiative might say, that students are not overidentified for special education and that therefore, the gap between general and regular education is not widening. They also question whether the retraining of general education teachers will make them able to truly use the skills as effectively in the regular classroom as special educators could in a pull-out program and whether retraining can affect their attitude and willingness to accept disabled students (pp. 6-8). Silver (1991) expressed concern that inclusion will result in a decrease in special education staff, and also that the general education teacher will have less time for the other students. Carr (1993), parent of a child with a learning disability, stated her belief that the dropout rate will soar if inclusion becomes a reality. Hallahan, Keller, McKinney, Lloyd, and Bryan (1988) pointed to the inconclusiveness of the research base which has been used to support the regular education initiative.

It is clear that these and other questions must be

examined in the context of inclusion settings. The study described in this article looks at strengths and weaknesses of the program as viewed by parents of included children, general educators, and principals during the first year of implementation in two midwestern suburban school districts.

Method

One administrative office (Joint Services) has administered special education services to the two districts in this study for 22 years. District I consists of 8 elementary, 2 middle, and 1 high school (total enrollment of approximately 5500 students); District II consists of 9 elementary, 2 middle, and 1 high school (total enrollment of approximately 8500 students). Prior to the 1992-93 school year, the range of services for students with disabilities included self-contained classrooms, resource (pull-out) programs, and consultation services. However, students did not necessarily attend their neighborhood schools and were bused to their appropriate program (within or outside of the district).

A grant proposal to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms was submitted to the Indiana state legislature by the Director of Joint Services during the spring of 1992. The grant was funded and the districts were designated as an inclusion pilot site. Elementary and middle school students with moderate or severe disabilities

and sensory impairments were integrated into their home schools during the 1992-93 school year; students with mild disabilities and high school students were to be included in subsequent years.

During the first year, 21 students with disabilities, new to their respective neighborhood schools in the two districts, were included in general education classrooms. (Approximately 20 other students with disabilities were, because of the nature of their disability, already in attendance at their home school; they would now be served in a general classroom setting as opposed to a pull-out program.) Paraprofessionals ("program assistants") were hired to help with the instruction of students in the classrooms. The role of the special educators varied according to individual student needs; some worked directly with students for a portion of the day in the regular classroom, while others acted as more of a consultant to classroom teachers. In all cases, the specialist collaborated with the classroom teacher to determine the manner in which the student with disabilities would interact in the classroom.

Data Analysis and Collection

In January of 1993, surveys assessing various aspects of the inclusion process were developed and sent to parents and teachers of 21 recently included children. A total of

10 parents and 20 teachers completed the surveys. Fifteen principals were personally interviewed during the months of February-April, 1993.

Both parent and teacher results include quantitative information as well as narrative comments. The parent survey included 12 questions involving a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 4=strongly disagree) and 4 questions requiring narrative response. The teacher survey included 14 questions involving the same 4-point Likert scale and 4 questions requiring narrative response. Frequency distributions were obtained on each quantifiable item using the SPSS-PC+ FREQUENCIES procedure. Narrative responses were analyzed for recurring themes. Data gathered from principal interviews was recorded as narrative response only and again, was analyzed for common reflections.

Results

Parent Respondents

Questions on the parent survey were designed to acquire information regarding satisfaction with their child's program and the effect of inclusion on their child both in and out of school. Ten parents responded to this survey. Table 1 shows data obtained for quantifiable items.

Insert Table 1 about here

All parent respondents indicated that they were pleased with their child's program and that it is accomplishing the

goal of including their child in the neighborhood school. Nine parents felt that they were part of the transition/IEP process to the neighborhood school and agreed that communication regarding the program had been good.

When asked to identify the elements in the inclusion setting that are most different from their child's previous placement, some parents discussed the social interaction, fostering of independence, and general responsiveness and caring of the other children. The new placement seems to have "settled" some children and aided in their academic growth.

One parent noted the benefits to her daughter as ". . . the fact that she is in a regular classroom all day and not going back and forth. She is having all information pertaining to learning a skill and not just getting bits and pieces."

Several factors emerged as prevalent when parents were asked what they liked most about the program. One of these was the closer proximity of the neighborhood school to the home. Related to this was the idea that the child with disabilities now associated more with other neighborhood children. Finally, some parents noted the helpful, positive attitudes of teachers, staff, and students.

In response to the question "What would you like to change in the current program?", a few parents stressed that

more communication with the special education teachers was needed. One parent stated, "I would like them to communicate with me more, instead of me always trying to get them." Another parent noted the need for a conference scheduled right before the opening of school to discuss the child's needs. Two parents recommended additional materials (playground equipment) and services (physical therapy) particular to the needs of their own child.

Concerning effects on children, 9 respondents agreed that their child's needs are being accommodated in their inclusion setting. Specific items on the survey addressed academic skills and social behavior. Nine parents believed that inclusion has had a positive effect on their child's skills and social interactions, and in addition, that their child has developed friendships in the classroom. Furthermore, all parents observed that inclusion has had a positive effect on their child's behavior.

Half the parents surveyed indicated that some of the friendships that have developed in the inclusion classroom have carried over beyond the school day. Of those with other children, all agreed that the siblings have reacted positively to the enrollment of the child with disabilities in the neighborhood school. All parents would recommend services in an included setting to another parent. Additional comments which appear to be representative of the

general positive response of parents included the following:

> All in all I feel this has been a change for the better and I have seen some positive growth socially in my son's behavior.
>
> We were not in favor of this when we were first notified; however, I feel this was a good move - have been very surprised and pleased with the children's reaction to my child and with how helpful the school staff has been. I think _____ is doing very well in the setting and it's been good for him to be with the other kids.
>
> All in all I'm so proud and happy with the outcome. I now have a little girl who is happy and content at school and that to me was the bottom line!

Teacher Respondents

Questions on the teacher survey were designed to elicit responses concerning the transition process, effects of inclusion on children, and reaction/feedback from parents. Twenty of 21 teachers responded to the survey. Data obtained on quantifiable items on this survey are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Eight respondents indicated that they were comfortable with the idea of including a child with disabilities in their classroom when first introduced to the idea in the

spring of 1992, and only 7 felt prepared for the included child at the start of the school year. In contrast, 18 felt that they were comfortable with the concept of inclusion in February of the first year of implementation.

Teachers were asked to comment on what they found most helpful in planning for the inclusion of a child with disabilities in their classroom. Working on the IEP as a team member, talking with special education teachers and program assistants, visiting the child's previous school, meeting with the child and parents previous to the placement, viewing videos of the child, and reading professional journals on the topic were all cited as contributing to the successful planning for the inclusion program.

When asked "What information did you need and not receive?", several teachers said, "None." Some indicated a need for more specific role definition and expectations of personnel. Some expressed a need for more training, such as "specific advice for working with autistic behavior." Other comments related to the need for training included the following:

> It would have been beneficial to observe how the special education teacher handled the special needs child (work, behavior, etc.)

I really did not know what to expect from my side and what to expect on a day to day level with my child.

I would have liked training at the college level in the area of this type of child. There is no way you can make a non-trained person ready to work with these children and meet their needs as well as a person trained extensively in this area.

Other information listed by teachers which they felt would have helped included a list of companies that manufacture equipment and supplies for students with disabilities, a list of resource agencies, a current history on the child, and more information distributed to parents of students in the building to aid in understanding and support.

Eighteen teachers indicated that they had contributed to the development of the IEP and the same number stated that they clearly understood the IEP.

Building administrators were largely seen as supportive as indicated by 18 teachers. Only 1 teacher saw administrative support as poor, while 1 did not respond to this item.

Children with and without disabilities appeared to be comfortable with inclusion as perceived by 19 teacher respondents. While 18 agreed that friendships with the included child had developed in the classroom, only half perceived that friendships had extended beyond the school

day.

When asked about the effect that inclusion has had on the children with disabilities, many comments reflected social benefits. Some teachers described children as being happy, adaptable, more independent, and able to work with other children. Others said that students had shown academic growth and increased verbal skills. Further, general education students seem to serve as role models for behavior. One teacher stated, "They have positive role models with appropriate classroom behaviors. They learn from their friends." Two teachers emphasized that the program assistants are critical to the success of the program.

An additional item addressed the academic, social, and behavioral effects that inclusion has had on children without disabilities. Regarding academic effects, many teachers indicated that the pace of instruction had been slowed down. Another problem appeared to be distractions, as one teacher stated, "Many times their day has been interrupted and their concentration has been broken." On the positive side, teachers stated that inclusion has given these students "a boost to work to their potential" and "an understanding that children learn differently." With only one exception, many social benefits were seen; these centered around acceptance of people with disabilities. The

effects on the behavior of students without disabilities has been largely positive in that students seem to take pride in acting as a good example for the included children. One teacher, however, indicated that "it took a lot longer for the kids to settle into a routine because the disruptive behavior seemed to rub off on the others." Another observed some mimicking of included students' disruptive behavior. This problem decreased as the included students' behaviors were modified.

Nineteen teacher respondents perceived that parents of included children felt positively about their child's program while 17 believed that parents of general education students also have positive reactions to the program.

In summary, most teachers--16 out of 20, would volunteer to include a child with disabilities in their classroom again. Three teachers, however, would not choose this option, while 1 did not respond. Most teachers--16 out of 20--also believed that inclusion is a good idea. Three teachers did not offer an opinion while 1 strongly disagreed with the inclusion concept.

Interviewed Principals

Personal interviews with fifteen principals representing the two school districts yielded basic information and interesting reflections and insights.

Without exception, students with disabilities

constituted 1% or less of the student population in the schools. In all schools, students with disabilities were placed with different general education teachers; others involved included music, art, and physical education teachers.

The interview consisted of 16 questions concerning the various phases of the inclusion process and factors associated with the success of and/or problems incurred during the first year.

Several questions addressed the planning phase. The decision and opportunity to participate in inclusion had been made at the district administrative level and the districts had been funded as a pilot site. In most cases--14 out of 15--administrators gave teachers the opportunity to volunteer to include a child with disabilities in their class.

In general, principals felt that they were adequately prepared for the inclusion of students with disabilities in their school. Of those who did not feel prepared, comments included the need for a longer "transition phase," training for "all needs of individual kids," and a few indicated that they were not sure what more could have prepared them for implementation.

The nature of communication and case conference meetings was addressed by several questions. Two out of 15

principals indicated that they met on a regular basis with teachers and program assistants. The majority of those interviewed met on an informal, as-needed basis as seen in the following descriptions:

> I keep an open door policy as needed.
>
> Meetings are informal, but at someone's request.
>
> Our philosophy is to treat students with disabilities as 'normal'--not to have monthly meetings.
>
> We meet whenever necessary--get together as a team.

All principals indicated that they were actively involved in annual case conference meetings for review of students' IEPs.

All principals said that they did not meet with students with disabilities any more than they met with general education students. Although most principals touch base with parents of both general education and students with disabilities, this also has been done on an informal basis.

Principals discussed their perceptions of teacher and parent attitudes, based on feedback received throughout the year. Nine stated that they believed the teachers at their schools were unconditionally positive, while the other six expressed their observation of an element of fear:

> The teachers are more accepting to a degree. Some still are concerned about the 'other kids.'

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Fear is still there, but also a good attitude.

There is still some apprehension.

There is some apprehension; it depends on the child involved.

With the exception of isolated incidents, parent feedback to principals has been very positive. One principal recalled that a parent of a student with disabilities was pleased that inclusion eliminated labeling; another mentioned a parent who had talked about his child's first birthday party and that the student has a "normal life now, comparatively." Parents of general education students have indicated to principals that they are happy that their kids want to help those with disabilities.

When asked the question "How comfortable are you now with the idea of inclusion compared to when you were first introduced to the concept?", some of the principals said that their support for the program had grown, but most emphasized that they were totally supportive from the beginning:

I'm very comfortable. It's the right thing to do--is good for all.

I have always been very comfortable; we are doing the right thing.

I was positive in the beginning. I bought into the idea that kids ought to attend neighborhood schools.

Principals described evidence they had seen that made them feel that inclusion was or was not working. Twelve noted that the interaction between students with and without disabilities was the most noticeable positive effect, while two described the improved behavior of students with disabilities. One simply stated that the "kids are happy." All of the principals felt that inclusion was working.

Four principals indicated that there were no problems in the program as it had been implemented. Others addressed a variety of concerns which had come up and were being addressed as the need arose:

. . . the time it takes away from other things.

. . . alleviating fear and anxiety.

. . . teachers adjusting instruction for mild/moderately disabled students.

Transportation can be a problem for field trips.

There are lots of people in the classroom; the program assistant's and teacher's styles have to be compatible.

Two final interview questions dealt with suggestions that might aid with placements in the future and advice for administrators not yet involved with inclusion. Concerning the former question, six principals thought that teacher visitation of a student in his/her previous environment was vital. As an alternative to this, one principal recommended showing a videotape of the student(s) to those who would be

involved in the inclusion setting. Other suggestions dealt with administrative support, additional meetings with parents prior to placement, and more time for teacher/program assistant planning.

Four principals would advise administrators not yet involved with inclusion that training and provision of time for staff development is critical to the success of the program. Overwhelmingly, principals felt that administrative support, leadership, and attitude are key factors as seen in these statements:

> Be positive. Be supportive of staff concerns.
>
> Trust your staff. . . .It has to be a cooperative effort.
>
> Look at all the positives/advantages. Attitude has a lot to do with it being accepted by teachers and parents.
>
> Listen to people and take those things seriously. Work for a win/win situation.
>
> If we want children to learn to be accepting, what better way than by modeling acceptance?

In summary, principals were largely positive about the inclusion program and perceived their role to be one of support and encouragement of accepting attitudes.

Conclusions

An analysis of the responses of parents, general

educators, and principals leads to the conclusion that these two districts met with much success in the first year of implementation of inclusion. As perceived by these groups, the greatest manifestation of this success was the social benefit to the included student. Three factors appear to have led to these positive results.

First, inservice training was critical. Teachers received some instruction about characteristics of various disabling conditions and modification/adaptation of curriculum. This training took place prior to students' placements in the neighborhood schools. Furthermore, teachers were given the opportunity to visit the students' previous schools, to directly observe them in classroom settings, and/or to view a tape of the students.

Secondly, since inclusion varies the roles and relationships among those involved, all must be cognizant of their new roles and willing to work with others. In accordance with the regular education initiative, general education teachers in this study were largely responsible for the planning and integration of the students into the classes. To ensure optimal conditions and opportunities, teachers, special education consultants, and program assistants collaborated as much as possible.

Finally, a positive attitude appears to be an indispensable attribute of all involved with the program.

Parents, principals, and teachers were striving to ease the transition and establish beneficial surroundings for the newly included students. Parents noted that this acceptance had eliminated some of the detrimental labeling, and both teachers and principals discussed the helpful behaviors of students without disabilities.

Parents, general educators, and principals discussed areas of concern and problems encountered during this first year. All emphasized the need for continuous in-service and instruction in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, in addition to that which was done initially. While collaboration and cooperative planning are vital, finding the time for this appears to be difficult. Finally, all indicated that the conditions that make inclusion work for an individual are very student-specific; that is, flexibility and creativity are needed in every case to ensure the best environment for student(s) with and without disabilities.

Limitations

The following limitations restrict the generalizabilitiy of findings to a larger population:

1. The study involved two midwestern suburban school districts of similar demographic make-up; one might not see similar results in differing (e.g., urban or rural) districts.

2. Although all parents, teachers, and principals involved with newly included students were contacted, by nature this total number was small. Furthermore, not all parents and teachers responded to the surveys.

3. There was no control for background experience of general educators in terms of number of years taught or courses/seminars taken in exceptionalities.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study gleans much information about factors associated with success in implementing inclusion on a limited scale. For school districts similar to the two involved in this research, conclusions yield practical suggestions and implications. An examination of the response of special educators to inclusion would be of considerable interest and importance in further studies. Observations of general education students and their parents could also enhance the development of successful classroom programs.

Critical analyses of the effects of inclusion need to be made wherever this paradigm is realized. As a movement which is sweeping the country, inclusion has vast implications for students with and without disabilities, as well as teachers and administrators involved with this programming.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Individual Parent Survey Items

Item		Mean	SD
1	(pleased with program)	1.50	.53
2	(pos. effect-child's skills)	1.60	.70
3	(pos. effect socially)	1.40	.70
4	(pos. effect on behavior)	1.70	.48
5	(program meeting goals)	1.40	.52
6	(child's needs accommodated)	1.80	.63
7	(feel part of transition)	1.20	.63
8	(child developed friendships)	1.70	.67
9	(friendships carried over)	2.40	.70
10	(communication good)	1.70	.67
11	(siblings reacted well)	1.10	.57
12	(would recommend inclusion)	1.40	.52

Note. Likert scale--1=strongly agree
4=strongly disagree

Observations

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Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Individual Teacher Survey Items

Item		Mean	SD
1	(comfortable in spring, 1992)	2.75	.97
2	(comfortable now)	1.80	.77
3	(included child comfortable)	1.50	.61
4	(children w/o disabilities comf.)	1.40	.60
5	(reaction of gen.ed. parents pos.)	1.75	.72
6	(reaction of included parents pos.)	1.40	.60
7	(friendships have developed)	1.50	.83
8	(friendships extended)	1.75	1.29
9	(understand IEP)	1.65	.67
10	(contributed to IEP)	1.45	.69
11	(felt prepared in fall)	2.85	.75
12	(admin. support good)	1.70	.80
13	(would volunteer again)	1.75	1.02
14	(believe inclusion a good idea)	1.35	.93

Note. Likert scale--1=strongly agree
4=strongly disagree

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